



ESPN

Brett Favre, felled by his fatal flaw

By Gregg Easterbrook
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Hamartia. The "tragic flaw" described by Aristotle: A leader cannot control his own inner shortcoming, which causes him to achieve the reverse of what he desired. In "Antigone," the king, Creon, tells himself he is acting in the interest of the city, when actually he is acting to glorify his own ego -- this hamartia destroys him. Brett Favre comes up a bit short of a character in ancient Thebes, but on Sunday he was brought low by hamartia all the same. It was not enough for Favre's team to reach the Super Bowl -- he had to get the credit. Game tied with

19 seconds remaining, Favre scrambled at about the New Orleans 40-yard line, with open field ahead of him. All he needed to do was run a few yards, hook-slide, call timeout, and the Vikings' strong-legged kicker, Ryan Longwell, had a solid chance to win the NFC championship. But the credit had to go to Favre; he had to throw a spectacular pass at the end, so television announcers would swoon. So he heave-hoed a dramatic across-the-field pass. It was intercepted, and the Saints won in overtime.

Perhaps you are thinking, "It was just a dumb mistake, and the whole thing happened in a couple of seconds." No. Two years of Favre's life built up to that moment. For two years, Favre has insisted that entire NFL franchises, the Jets and the Vikings, become thralls to his celebrity. He has used his stature to demand, demand, demand -- the crux of the demands are always attention and publicity for himself. Now he is brought low. In two of the past three seasons, Favre has lost in the NFC Championship Game. Each time, his team seemed poised to win at the end; each time, Favre's final play of the game was a disastrous interception. And each of those title losses was in overtime -- to punish Favre for his hamartia, twice the football gods allowed him to come so close, so close, then denied him. Favre has been brought so low, he is now being laughed at in Wisconsin, and he has only himself to blame. Aristotle would not be surprised by the ending of the Favre saga. If, of course, it was the ending.